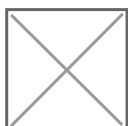




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## **Rationing carbon emissions for travel: a promising alternative to the carbon tax?**



Submitted by Forum Vies Mobiles on Mon, 12/07/2020 - 18:31

Mots clés

carbon footprint

carbon credit

carbon card

État du projet

Finished research

Visuel

<div class="logo logo-mobile"> <a href="https://fr.forumviesmobiles.org/"> <a href="https://fr.forumviesmobiles.org/">Contact : Matthieu Bloch </a></p> <br>

So far, no strategy in France has effectively been able to reduce transport-related carbon emissions<sup>[^1]</sup>, whether through technological innovations (improving engines, electric cars, etc.) or incentives to use low-polluting means of transport (bicycle, public transport, etc.). As a result, politicians are starting to think about how to limit the volume of carbon-emitting trips themselves. This was the stated goal of the carbon tax hike on fuel, which was opposed by the Yellow Vests movement and rejected by the Citizens Convention for Climate. It is unfair insofar as it disproportionately affects the poorest households and it is inefficient because it has little impact on the lifestyles of the richest members of society<sup>[^2]</sup>, who also happen to be those who pollute the most. Can we come up with a policy that manages to limit carbon-based travel all the while being fair? Could directly capping the amount of polluting trips allocated to each French individual be an alternative to the carbon tax?

This would have at least two advantages:

- it would prevent emitting more carbon than the limits set at the national level.
- it would give each French person the same rights, regardless of their means.

This is part of a wider discussion on allocating "carbon quotas" (or carbon credits), in other words limited quantities of carbon emissions, for all human activities (housing, mobility, work...). The idea, which gets bad press in France but is increasingly discussed by civil society, is now advocated by researchers (such as Mathilde

Szuba<sup>[^3]</sup> and Jean-Baptiste Fressoz<sup>[^4]</sup>), elected officials (François Ruffin and Delphine Batho<sup>[^5]</sup>) and activists (such as the Assises du Climat initiative led by Pierre Calame<sup>[^6]</sup>). So far, supporters and detractors are mainly arguing at the level of principles, as the rationing of emissions has never been the subject of a practical and quantified feasibility study.

### **53% are in favour:**

According to the survey carried out by the Mobile Lives Forum during the spring lockdown, 53% of French people would be in favour of rationing measures aimed at reducing the volume of trips, provided that this rule is fair and doesn't allow the better-off to work around it.<sup>[^7]</sup>

### **It's already being done:**

This idea has already been tested, as in the recent case of Lahti, a city in Finland that rewarded residents who voluntarily managed to keep their urban trips within a certain quota<sup>[^8]</sup>.

## **The goal of the project**

The Mobile Lives Forum wanted to assess the feasibility, at the national scale in France, of a policy of rationing the most carbon-emitting trips (i.e., those made by car and by plane) in order to achieve the goal set by the National Low Carbon Strategy<sup>[^9]</sup> of being carbon neutral by 2050. Transport is today the leading emitter of greenhouse gases in France (30% of national emissions in 2015). As these emissions are entirely energy related, the strategy aims to reduce emissions by 28% in 2030 compared to 2015, and to make transport completely emissions-free by 2050. These goals remain abstract: how do we make sure we live up to these commitments and what concrete impacts will they have on the lives of French people?

To find out, the Mobile Lives Forum approached transport historian and engineer Arnaud Passalacqua, director of the master's program in Energy, Ecology and Society at the University of Paris.

The Mobile Lives Forum asked the students to:

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[^1]: Reducing the carbon footprint of mobility, what policies in France?,

forumviesmobiles.org [^2]: As recognized in the “Report on the environmental impact of the state budget” in the context of the 2021 finance bill (PLF). [^3]:

Libération, Mathilde Szuba: "We must politically regulate all consumption for the purposes of justice", July 2019 [^4]: Le Monde, Jean-Baptiste Fressoz, "Rationing

transport is much more democratic than increasing CO2 taxes", August 2019 [^5]:



National Assembly, Bill to establish an individual carbon quota to limit the use of places, presented by Mr. François RUFFIN and Ms. Delphine BATHO, June 2020 [^6]: Le Monde, Pierre Calame: "Against global warming, we must establish an obligation of result", March 2020 [^7]: [Survey on the impacts of the lockdown on French people's lifestyles and mobility](#), forumviesmobiles.org [^8]: UIA, CitiCap: Citizen's cap-and-trade co-created [^9]: Ministry of Ecological Transition, The National Low Carbon Strategy [^10]: Ministry of Ecological Transition, National Transport and Travel Survey (ENTD) 2008

## Chapô

Transport is responsible for 30% of greenhouse gas emissions in France, and this figure is constantly increasing. Technological innovations and the push for a “modal shift” aren’t enough to compensate for the increasing number of oil-fuelled kilometers travelled. Personal carbon allowances are presented as an alternative to taxation. These would allow us to acknowledge and respect the planet’s limits, distribute energy resources equitably and pursue public policies that respond to this new environmental state of affairs. Such allowances applied to polluting travel could take the form of a carbon card and be distributed according to democratically defined criteria. Would such a proposal be possible, fair and desirable?

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